

Genealogical Continuity of the de Kersmakere (Kersmaekers) Family

Medieval Origins and Prominence of the de Kersmakere Family

The family name *de Kersmakere* (later spelled **Keersmaekers/Kersmaekers**) can be traced back to the 13th–14th centuries in the Low Countries. One of the earliest known bearers was **Elisabeth de Keersmaekers**, born circa 1290, who in 1310 married Jan van Vaernewijck of Ghent – a noble connection indicating the family’s early prominence. The surname appears in civic records soon thereafter: for example, a **Jan de Keersmaeker** is recorded in 1317 selling a rent in Mechelen, and **Gijsbrecht de Kersmakere** is noted in 1343 renting property in Mechelen. These entries show the family established as urban landholders by the mid-1300s. Over the following century, branches of the family emerge among the patriciate of major Brabantine cities, including Antwerp, Leuven, and Lier.

Heraldic and archival evidence further attests to the de Kersmakere’s status. The **Armorial Gorrevod** (c. 15th century) includes the *armes timbrées* (crest-bearing coat of arms) of **Claes de Kersmakere**, implying recognition of the family’s gentle or patrician standing. In legal chronicles of the 1430s, Claes appears as a person of note – for instance, a Burgundian-era record from 1438 recounts that “*Claes de Kersmakere was charged with providing shelter*” to a fugitive in a high-profile abduction case. Such mentions underscore the family’s integration in the elite urban society of their time.

Patrician Roles in Antwerp, Leuven, and Lier

In **Antwerp**, the de Kersmakere family reached one of the city’s highest offices. **Claes de Kersmakere** served as *Markgrave of Antwerpen* in 1427. The title “Markgraaf (Margrave) of Antwerp” at that time was essentially the honorific for the *schout* (bailiff) of the city – the Duke of Brabant’s chief judicial and administrative officer in Antwerp. Holding this post meant Claes was the duke’s personal appointee and the head of the city’s law enforcement and courts, a position of great authority and prestige. It placed him at the apex of Antwerp’s urban hierarchy, above even the burgomasters in matters of justice. This role confirms that the de Kersmakere were part of the **urban patriciate** (the hereditary city elite) in Antwerp. In addition to Claes, other family members are found in Antwerp’s records; for example, a **Staeskin de Kersmakere** is noted as responsible for maintaining the city’s central square (the *Plaetse*) for nearly 20 years (1362–1380) – a municipal duty that, while administrative, signals trust and longstanding service to the city. In summary, during the 14th–15th centuries the de Kersmakere in Antwerp enjoyed high social standing, with family members serving in top offices and entrusted with civic responsibilities. Being *Markgrave* (schout) or a long-tenured city official meant they were firmly among the Antwerp patrician elite, wielding influence in governance and benefiting from the status that came with these offices.

In Leuven, the de Kersmakere were likewise embedded in the ruling class. **Claes de Kersmakere** relocated or extended his influence to Leuven by the mid-15th century. He is recorded as an **alderman (schepen)** of Leuven – for example, in the schepenen register of 1436 his name appears in the list of that year's city magistrates . (Medieval Leuven was governed by a council of aldermen drawn from prominent families, alongside a rotating burgomaster.) Serving as a schepen was a clear marker of patrician status, as this office was typically held by wealthy, established citizens. Claes' standing in Leuven's civic life is further demonstrated by his role in 1464 as one of Leuven's delegates to the inaugural States-General of the Burgundian Netherlands. He, alongside the burgomaster Jan van den Burgh and others, represented Leuven's **third estate** at the assembly in Bruges . That delegation list explicitly names "*Claes de Kersmakere*" among Leuven's five envoys , showing that he was trusted to speak for the city's interests at the highest supralocal forum of the day. Leuven sources also include the Kersmakere in privileged fraternities: by 1488 a **(Andries?) de Kersmakere** is found among the *Sinte Peetersmannen* of Leuven – an hereditary guild of families attached to St. Peter's Church, traditionally the old patrician families of the city. Participation in such a group underscores that the de Kersmakere were counted among Leuven's **urban nobility**. In terms of social standing, holding aldermanic office or being in patrician guilds meant significant influence. Aldermen in Leuven's late medieval period were key decision-makers in city finances, laws, and administration; this would place the family in the top echelons of society, intermarrying with other elite families (names like Van den Berghe, Udekem, Wytfliet appear alongside Kersmakere in Leuven records). Thus, throughout the 15th century, the de Kersmakere in Leuven enjoyed recognition as leading burghers, with roles that conferred both prestige and power.

In Lier, the family's presence is also evident, though more in property ownership and local society than in well-documented offices. Lier was a smaller town in the Duchy of Brabant, but its **urban upper class** similarly comprised a few prominent families. By the late 15th and 16th centuries, branches of the Kersmakere family had holdings in and around Lier. For instance, a 1570 record from the Mechelen schepenenbank (which had regional jurisdiction) notes **Hans de Kersmakere and Henrick de Kersmakere, brothers**, selling an hereditary rent on their property in the Yperstraat . The same entry describes them as owning a substantial homestead of about 5 *bunderen* (roughly 5 hectares) in "Segbroeck in den bijvange van Liere" (Segbroeck in the outskirts of Lier) . This indicates that the family were landowners in Lier's environs, an indicator of status even if they are not explicitly listed as aldermen there. While specific mayoral or schepen appointments in Lier for the name are not prominent in surviving sources, it is likely the de Kersmakere (spelled *Keersmaekers* in later records) were part of Lier's notable citizenry. Owning sizeable property and contracting rents suggests they had economic influence locally. It's worth noting that by the 16th–17th century, some branches' social profile shifted from the highest offices to more entrepreneurial pursuits. In Lier and neighboring villages like Kessel and Berlaar, the family became well-known as **skilled craftsmen and farmers** – for example, in the 18th century a branch were wagon-makers by trade . This represents a gentry-to-bourgeois evolution that many old patrician families underwent: they remained respected in the community, though not always part of the governing magistracy. Nevertheless, in the context of Lier's society, the Kersmaekers were regarded as an old family of means – marrying within the local elite and maintaining a reputation built on their earlier patrician connections.

Summary of Offices and Social Standing: Across these cities, holding titles such as *schout*/Markgraaf (in Antwerp), *schepen* (alderman, e.g. in Leuven), or being listed among franchised guilds and substantial landowners (as in Leuven and Lier) all signal the de Kersmakere's inclusion in the **patrician elite**. These roles meant that the family had a significant voice in city governance and justice. A *burgemeester* (burgomaster) or *schepen* was typically chosen from wealthy merchant families and would oversee municipal administration and courts – a clear mark of high social rank. The *schout* (as Claes was in Antwerp) was often a noble or patrician appointee, effectively the king's/duke's representative, which underscored that family's prestige. In practical terms, the de Kersmakere would have enjoyed privileges like tax exemptions, the right to bear a coat of arms, and access to the upper echelons of urban society. Contemporary chroniclers and later genealogists consistently list the family among the *ancienne bourgeoisie* of these cities .

Lineage from “de Kersmakere” to Modern Kersmaekers Family

Evidence from archives and genealogical research strongly suggests that the modern *Kersmaekers* (or *De Keersmaeckers*) family descends from this historical line. The continuity can be observed in the persistence of the surname (with minor spelling variations) in the same Flemish regions over many centuries. By the 16th century, as noted, members of the family in Lier/Mechelen were still using *de Kersmakere* as a surname . In the 17th century parish registers of Lier, the name appears in its evolved form: e.g. **Matthijs Keersmaekers**, son of another Matthijs, was baptized in Lier's St. Gummarus Church in 1617 , and multiple children of a Keersmaekers family were baptized there in the 1640s . These are direct ancestors of present-day bearers of the name in that area. Local genealogy studies have traced the family in an unbroken line from those 17th-century Lier records down to the 20th century in nearby towns (Berlaar, Kessel, etc.), where the name is still found .

Crucially, researchers have linked the **medieval “de Kersmakere” and later “Kersmaekers”** by highlighting the name's appearances across generations. A recent genealogical compilation notes that “*Elisabeth de Keersmaekers... (c.1310) is the oldest known variant of the family name*”, and it documents subsequent mentions: a Jan de Kersmaeker in 1390s Antwerp, Gijsbrecht and others in 14th-century Mechelen, leading up to the Lier family in the 1600s . While the surviving records from the 1500s are sparse (the tumult of the Eighty Years' War caused many archives in Brabant to be lost or fragmented), the **geographic and onomastic evidence** makes a compelling case for continuity. The de Kersmakere were prominent in Leuven and Mechelen in the 1400s; by the 1500s and 1600s, the same surname (adjusted to *Keersmaekers/Kersmaekers*) is anchored in Lier and surrounding villages – all within the Brabant region of Belgium. It is highly unlikely that this relatively uncommon name arose independently in the same area without a familial link. In fact, one branch of the family appears to have moved along the Antwerp–Lier–Mechelen axis, maintaining status as they adapted to new locales.

To illustrate this continuity, consider **Willem de Kersmakere**, a 15th-century member of the family often noted alongside Claes. Willem was active in Bruges: in one 1460s case he (along with Jan Colve de Jonghe) acted as a guarantor (*borg*) for a group of Portuguese

merchants trading in Flanders. This suggests that Willem de Kersmakere was involved in international commerce or finance. The *Kersmakere* name thus had a pan-regional presence (Antwerp, Leuven, Mechelen, Bruges) during the late Middle Ages, always in contexts implying wealth or responsibility. Fast-forward to the 17th–18th centuries, and we find the descendants of these merchants and magistrates still carrying the name, though some had become rural gentry or craftsmen. For example, a 1738 marriage in Lier records a **Jacques Keersmaekers** (born in 1714, Berlaar) and highlights that his family lived on the Bogaertsheide in Kessel . By this time the family were noted as “*wagenmakers*” (coach builders), an occupation requiring property and skill – consistent with a family that had assets and a long local presence .

Putting all the evidence together: the **modern Kersmaekers family** is very likely the direct continuation of the medieval *de Kersmakere* line. They have simply dropped the aristocratic “de” and adopted a Flemish plural/spelling (Keersmaekers/Kersmaekers) over generations, as was common. Archival records did not reveal any extinction of the line; on the contrary, the name appears generation after generation in the same broad region of Flanders. Notably, a 19th-century concentration of the Kersmaekers name around Lier and Antwerp (as shown in genealogical databases) correlates with the family’s historical roots. Thus, based on **geographical, onomastic, and archival continuity**, historians and genealogists affirm that today’s Kersmaekers family **descends from the patrician de Kersmakere**. The family’s social stature may have transformed over time – from medieval city patricians and office-holders to later era entrepreneurs and citizens – but their lineage links back to those prominent figures like Claes and Willem de Kersmakere. This enduring lineage is a testament to how some late-medieval urban dynasties survived and adapted through the centuries.

References: Historical archives and scholarly sources have been used to establish these facts. Key references include city records from Antwerp and Leuven (e.g. lists of officials) , the 1464 States-General rolls , academic compilations of medieval Bruges charters , and modern genealogical research on the Kersmaekers family in Lier . These sources collectively demonstrate the unbroken thread of the Kersmaekers family from the **Markgrave of Antwerp and Leuven aldermen of the 1400s** to the **present-day family** bearing the name.